

The demands for love and understanding and time to heal are often impossible to meet because no matter how much love, time, and understanding is given it is never enough! The former offender (Bob) is forever held as an emotional hostage by his deeds of the past.

These responses are often confusing to the former offender. For example, things at home may be going just fine, they may have enjoyed the day of companionship and then apparently out of the blue the victim (Carol) suddenly becomes angry and nearly hostile toward them. Sometimes no amount of asking or pleading will pry from their lips what happened. Their questions and attempts to understand are met with silence or responses like, "You should know!" or, "If you loved me, you would know!"

Intimacy is mostly non-existent between the two. There may be sex, but no intimacy because she is not going to allow herself to be vulnerable again. Her heart becomes a closed room to him.

Small and insignificant matters balloon into major confrontations, and there is little peace in the home. Over time every word and deed is analyzed and becomes cannon fodder for arguments that degenerate into hostility on both sides.

If there are children involved, the victim may enlist the support of the children against the offender. I would say this especially true in situations when the husband is caught with pornography. Because the wife is experiencing such betrayal on such an intimate level she strikes out toward the children to ruin their opinion of him and to shame him into stopping.

What is quickly evident in our fictitious case is that while Bob was responsible for the sin that brought this couple to the table, God has used it to reveal some areas in Carol's heart that need to be dealt with also.

What I have learned through ministering to people like our imaginary couple Carol and Bob, is that it quickly becomes evident that on some level- and I am not always sure they realize it- the former-victim-turned-offender (Carol) is enjoying the grilling the other person gets because it validates their anger and bitterness toward them for these (in some cases) long standing sins.

Likewise, the former-offender-turned-victim (Bob) is realizing that they are not necessarily the scum of the earth they have been made out to be since they repented of their sin!

So the focus of the people helping must be balanced equally between the victims and offenders, of which there are now two of each!

Observation has taught me that usually by the time we get to a married couple round table the original offender has repented and has begun to demonstrate the good fruit of that repentance. He/she is confused as to why things in the marriage are still going so badly overall and why their spouse reacts and responds the way they do.

The challenge in any of these situations is to move beyond the victim mentality, cease being the offender, and go forward in a restored relationship.

For that to take place the heart must be affected in the areas of forgiveness, pride, anger and its resulting bitterness, and fear just to name a few places to begin with Carol. A person has really got to be willing to humble themselves in such a case but I can think of no better place to start the work than in the area of pride.

No matter what the resulting issues may be, it is imperative that we remember that God is actively opposing the prideful person. He is standing against you if you are prideful and self-righteous! (Jas. 4:6) This thinking often arises out of the misbelief that you are incapable of such a deed as has been done to you. That you are too holy, too good, too sanctified to ever be caught up in such sin. Well, that maybe true for whatever the specific sin is that has been done against you or by your husband but I promise you that you are capable of something just as grievous to God. You must repent.

Remind yourself daily of your need for the gospel! God will take care of your husband (of offender); you must now focus on your own sinful areas. (Rom 12:18, 1 Thes. 4:11)

Remember that you are also unworthy of forgiveness, and mercy and grace! Demonstrate the kind of forgiveness that God has:

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8

God's forgiveness of you is conditional only in the sense that a person belongs to Him to receive it. He forgave us in eternity past when He predestined us to be His children (Eph. 1) and He throws our sin as far as the ends of the earth. (Ps. 103:12) God does not "forget" our sin; he chooses to remember it no more! (Jer. 31:34; Heb. 10:17) You can do the same!

...seeing that *His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence.* 2 Peter 1:3

Although I only quoted verse 3 for space reasons, the following verses to 8 are also quite appropriate to remind us what we have been enabled to do and what God expects from us as a result. Choose today to remember no more the sin of the one who has hurt you. Tell him or her you forgive them from the heart because it glorifies God to do so and then determine to never again bring it up to them, yourself, or anyone else.

Do not give in to the temptation to manipulate by emotions. Ask yourself if what you want to do glorifies God. Determine to attack the problems before you, not the person. Anger is an emotion given by God to motivate us to solve problems not to hurt each other by. (Eph. 4:26,27)

You will be amazed at how these little steps can make such a difference in your heart and life and these people and relationships you have struggled with for so long. You don't need to avenge yourself or to be afraid of being made a fool of. God, who sees all and knows all, will honor your desire to follow Him and to honor Him by how you live.

Go forward in freedom from the past!

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The Victim's Heart



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Human nature being what it is, we are often presented with cases where one person has caused harm to another.

Many of the cases we deal with are marital situations where husband or wife has grievously sinned against the other and have broken a sacred trust, violated the marriage covenant, or become untrustworthy in any number of ways.

I have created several examples to help you understand the background. (It is important that I state that these examples while common are fictitious and do not represent any one person living or dead or any actual case history or personal story.)

Example #1: Husband has been secretly viewing pornography on the internet or DVD. Wife discovers this and trust is shattered. She considers this adultery. Everything is now suspect about her husband. He is now a liar, cheater, adulterer, pervert, untrustworthy, purveyor of illicit sex, whoremonger.

Example #2: Wife has been spending money on credit that the family does not have. She has run all the credit cards to maximum and there is not enough money in the family budget to make the monthly payments on them plus the usual bills. After repeated attempts to stop, and numerous broken promises husband discovers wife has opened new charge accounts and is having the bills sent to her mother's address. Husband's trust is shattered. His wife is a liar, and has stolen from the rest of the family by her self-indulgent spending, she is untrustworthy.

Example #3: Wife has been involved with numerous extra-marital affairs. Each time she promises to never do it again. Husband has been forgiving of her, and is granting her forgiveness time and time again only to find another "love" note, receive mysterious "wrong number" phone calls, and realize his wife has unexplained missing blocks of time in her schedule. She is an adulterer, cheater, and liar.

Example #4: Husband has always been an angry guy. He has yelled about everything their whole married life. He has never admitted he was wrong in all the years they have been married, everything has been her fault. It has

gotten so bad that he has been forced to get some help (by whatever means) and has received counseling that has begun to make a difference in his life. He is viewed as angry, hostile, unreasonable, and untrustworthy.

In these situations there is always a victim. The heart of a person who has been victimized is focused on protecting self from being hurt again.

The heart is the biblical term Jesus Himself used to describe the inner man. It contains your thoughts, beliefs, emotions, mind, thoughts, spirit, desires, soul, will, and every other immaterial thing about you. Your heart is the place where the essence of who you are resides.

Please allow me to draw you a word picture to help you understand. Picture the shape of a heart and in the center of that heart is you, and the heart of self desires to protect "me" as victim.

Next to that heart is a box that would contain the thoughts, beliefs and desires that would flow from a heart that is protecting itself from being hurt again. Those thoughts, beliefs, and desires might look something like these:

- I must protect myself
- I must look out for myself
- I must not ever let this happen to me again
- He/she is not trustworthy
- I must check up on everything he/she does
- I must not be fooled again
- Verify, verify, verify before trusting

So, we have the heart that is set on "self" and protecting "self" from being victimized or hurt again. Then we have a box flowing from that heart that contains some thoughts, beliefs, and desires someone in that position might have. And finally picture another box next to the first one. This one contains what the results of living this way would be.

- Suspicion
- Lack of faith
- Lack of trust
- Inability to move forward
- Disbelief
- Unresolved anger
- Unresolved bitterness
- A living desire to "make him/her" pay

I have seen this play out over and over in numerous people's lives and it is a sorrow to behold.

- The victim is suspicious of the one who hurt them and ever-watchful- almost predatory like of the other person.
- The victim is suspect of many of the actions of the offender.
- The victim is suspect of the motives of the offender.
- The victim perceives that the offender is always plotting and scheming some new hurt.
- The victim is often irrational about the actions of the offender
- The victim seeks to demonize the offender in every respect.

In some cases, where there is no repentance on the part of the offender, these things are true in part or totally. In some of these cases, we teach the victim how to live with the offender in a Christ-like manner bearing up with the strength of God. In other cases we can allow the victim to seek a divorce after other means are satisfied and it is clear that hope for reconciliation is gone.

However, the majority of our cases of this kind are marital and they involve two believers who say they are willing to submit to our counsel and who say they are willing to change. What we find through the counseling process is that even when the presenting issue of the offender is dealt with biblically there is much work yet to be done.

In cases where a person as been victimized what we frequently see is that even when the offender confesses his/her sin and repents it is not perceived as "enough" by the victim. For clarity purposes, today we will call our victim "Carol" and our perpetrator "Bob."

Bob has recognized his sin against Carol and through the counseling process Bob has experienced true heart change and has begun to live these changes out daily. He has confessed to Carol his sin against her, and asked her forgiveness.

Carol has been down Apology Lane before with Bob, more times than she can remember. She is not at all sure this is for real and has even said to the counselor that she doesn't know why this time will be any different. She does not trust Bob's words or his new actions. She is always looking to catch Bob in some act of deception. She is critical of his professions of change and it shows in everything she says and does concerning Bob.

Carol, the once-victim, often perceives herself as the righteous, wounded party. She has adopted a position of self-righteousness and her pride in that is evident. She appears to believe that her spouse is not as spiritual or as acceptable to God as she is. She communicates through verbal and non-verbal communication that she has no sin, or certainly none as egregious as Bob's, and almost literally peers down her nose at her spouse "The Sinner."

What has happened here is that the two people have switched rolls and the one who was a victim (Carol) now becomes the offender. If this at all describes a situation you find yourself in, please don't tune me out now!

This is displayed in ongoing bitterness, hard heartedness, critical spirit, condemnation and in general, a "raising the bar" lifestyle. "It" (whatever change has been made, whatever accountability is in place, how ever many hoops to jump through) is never good enough. Carol is always looking for that one shed of evidence to prove to herself, the counselor, their friends, but most especially to Bob that he hasn't changed one little bit.

In these situations the person (in this fictitious case, Carol) must be confronted about her sinful attitudes toward her husband. She must be called to account on these numerous levels.

Often, someone like Carol would come to counseling with the expectation that the former offender (Bob) be the only one challenged, rebuked, corrected or the only one who is in need of any kind of change! She is often very offended when confronted about her own sin, believing and saying things like, "This is not why we are here." "Why are you picking on me?" "What about him/her?" This position of self-righteousness leaves little room for examination of their own heart, and little room for accepting any responsibility or contribution to the problems that led up to the violations. There will be some admission that "I am not perfect either" but there is much more concern toward pointing out their spouses wrongs. When challenged in the counseling process, their responses often begin with, "Yes, but he....." "Well, I did (blank) and she" in an attempt to shift any blame away from themselves.

In situations where someone like Carol does say she forgives, I see another common issue arise, the demand for "love" and "understanding" for how long it is taking to get over the offence. This is displayed by radical mood swings, crying jags, silent treatment, reminders of the past offences that she is quick to assure him he is forgiven of!